Extending the Definition of Quality Childcare: Preschool Teachers' General Psychological and Job-Related Wellbeing

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Background

High quality care makes a difference in children's learning and development. Children enrolled in high quality care have better cognitive and social-emotional functioning than those in lower quality care (Li et al., 2013).

What constitutes high quality care? Process (e.g., emotional support) and structural quality (e.g., group size) are emphasized as predictors of the quality of care and child outcomes (e.g., Mashburn et al., 2008). In recent studies, teachers' social-emotional wellbeing has emerged a factor related to overall quality (e.g., Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Teachers' general psychological and job-related wellbeing are associated with classroom organization, caregiving behavior, and relationships with children (e.g., Li Grining et al., 2010), all important predictors of children's cognitive and social skills (Peisner-Ferinberg, 2001). **Yet, the predictors of teachers' wellbeing are understudied.**

We propose that ***contextual factors*** (i.e., environmental climate and state-level policy) serve as predictors of teachers' psychological and job-related wellbeing.

- Different policies can be associated with teachers' wellbeing because policies set the structural quality and overall climate of child-care programs.
- Environmental climate can be associated with teachers' psychological state when the work environment is not perceived as ideal or when teachers feel a lack support (Zinsser et al., 2013).

Research Questions

1) How are states' early care and education policies associated with teachers' general and job-related wellbeing?
2) What are the associations between program environmental characteristics and teachers' general and job-related wellbeing?

Methods

Sample

Data was collected in a national study (random sampling with stratification criteria of geographical location & program type), yielding responses from 1,129 preschool teachers (16% response rate).

Participants

- ✓ Mean age: 45.31 years
- ✓ Race/ethnicity: 87.4% white, 6.9% black, 5.7% of other race
- ✓ Gender: 97.4% female
- ✓ Median income: $40,001 -$50,000
- ✓ Education: 79.6% A.A. degree
- ✓ Marital status: 68.4% married, 13.6% single

Measures

- ✧ ***Program Environment*****:** 4 items from the Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey (Jorde-Bloom, 1989); 16 items (α = .87) from the Confusion, Hubbub, and Order Scale (CHAOS-D, Wachs et al., 2004); 1 item about the number of teaching assistants.
- ✧ ***Policy*****:** Director's education, teacher's education, and teacher's initial training in child development (Childcare Aware of America, 2013).
- ✧ ***Teacher's Psychological Wellbeing*****:** 6 items (α = .79) from the COPE scale (Carver, 1997); 10 items (α = .84) from Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983); 9 items (α = .84) from the Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977).
- ✧ ***Teacher's Job-Related Wellbeing*****:** 2 items on emotional exhaustion; 1 item on job competence; 2 items on job satisfaction.
- ✧ ***Covariates:*** Teacher's education, licensure, years as lead teacher, and salary.

Results

Multiple regression analyses using SPSS revealed several significant results. Independent variables fell into two categories; policy and program environment. Variables within each category were then entered to predict general psychological and job-related wellbeing.

Policy

- ➢ Other than few negative correlations between the required minimum education level for directors and exhaustion and energy drains, we discovered no relationships between state-level policy and wellbeing.

Program Environment

- ➢ There were strong negative associations between chaos and coping, job competence, job satisfaction, and position satisfaction.
- ➢ Strong positive associations were found between chaos and stress, depression, exhaustion, and draining of energy.
- ➢ Working conditions were negatively associated with stress, depression, and exhaustion and positively associated with coping, job satisfaction, and position satisfaction.
- ➢ There were positive associations between relationship with co-workers and job competence, job satisfaction, and position satisfaction.
- ➢ We found positive associations between relationship with directors and job competence and position satisfaction.

Table 1. Results from Multiple Regression Models

	Coping	Stress	Depression	Exhaustion	Drains energy	Job competence	Satisfaction with job	Satisfaction with position
	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)
Policy								
Minimum education - director	.05(.04)	-.04(.38)	.00(.26)	-.08(.13)**	-.09(.12)**	.05(.07)	.01(.07)	-.00(.09)
Minimum education - lead teacher	.00(.04)	.01(.48)	-.05(.33)	-.01(.16)	-.04(.15)	.00(.09)	.04(.09)	-.02(.11)
Initial training in CD	-.07(.03)$^{+}$	-.02(.37)	-.06(.25)$^{+}$	-.01(.16)	-.05(.12)	-.00(.07)	-.02(.07)	-.02(.08)
Program Environment								
Relationship w co-workers	.04(.02)	-.04(.21)	-.04(.14)	-.03(.07)	-.00(.07)	.11(.04)**	.08(.04)*	.12(.05)***
Relationship w director	.06(.02)	-.00(.21)	-.03(.14)	.01(.07)	-.01(.07)	.08(.04)*	.02(.04)	.14(.05)***
Working conditions	.09(.02)*	-.12(.21)***	-.08(.15)*	-.12(.07)***	-.07(.07)$^{+}$	.01(.04)	.20(.04)***	.28(.05)***
Number of assistant teachers	.00(.01)	.02(.10)	-.03(.07)	.03(.03)	.03(.03)	.02(.02)	.03(.02)	.04(.02)
Chaos	-.16(.03)***	.39(.37)***	.29(.26)***	.37(.16)***	.39(.12)***	-.21(.07)***	-.18(.07)***	-.09(.09)**
Teacher Qualifications								
Education	.06(.00)$^{+}$	-.00(.02)	.03(.01)	.04(.01)	.01(.01)	-.04(.00)	-.06(.00)*	-.07(.00)*
License	-.01(.00)	-.00(.00)	-.02(.01)	-.02(.00)	-.02(.00)	-.03(.00)	.02(.00)	.03(.00)
Years of experience as lead	-.06(.00)$^{+}$	-.06(.02)$^{+}$	-.04(.01)	.03(.01)	-.01(.01)	.06(.00)$^{+}$	.08(.00)*	.09(.00)***
Salary	.10(.01)**	-.07(.07)*	.01(.05)	.06(.02)$^{+}$	.06(.02)*	.10(.01)**	.13(.01)***	.14(.02)***
R^2	.07	.23	.12	.18	.18	.10	.16	.27

Note. $^{+}p < .10$; $^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .00$

Discussion

Working conditions and child-care chaos were consistently associated with teachers' psychological and job-related wellbeing, and better relationships with co-workers predicted teachers' better job competence and higher job satisfaction.

We suggest more emphasis should be given to improving program environments, as this will likely have an association with overall teacher wellbeing.

- ❖*Chaos* – Teachers should be provided better support to manage chaos in the classroom through adequate professional development. Additionally, collaboration among co-workers offers teachers new strategies and approaches to controlling chaos.
- ❖*Relationships with Co-Workers* – By creating a sense of community in the early learning environment, teacher wellbeing might be improved. This can be created through informal collaboration (e.g. asking co-workers for advice or recommendations) and management-led team building.
- ❖*Working Conditions* – Comfortable working environments with adequate resources for teachers will likely improve wellbeing. The environment will act as the "third teacher," relieving teachers of stressors associated with compensating for an inadequate environment.

Questions & Comments to **garcia.405@osu.edu**
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